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ABSTRACT

By means of a series of educational activities over 8 months, this practicum study sought to institute a prosocial curriculum for preschool children. The curriculum was meant to teach trust, autonomy, and skills for handling aggressive feelings. Subjects were 18 four- and five-year-old children. Activities exposed children to areas such as: (1) physical differences and abilities; (2) body awareness, especially in relation to space and motion; (3) concepts of smoothness, touch, gentleness, and roughness; (4) awareness of sounds and of the emotions potentially connected to them; (5) development of a sense of trust and self-control; (6) the value of partnerships; (7) conflict resolution skills; and (8) kindness. Activities promoting these concepts were conducted for approximately one half hour each school day. Results showed that, although some children have trouble adapting to group environments, increasing their sense of autonomy and trust assists in their adaptation. Exposure to violence is a difficult force to counteract; however, activities which communicate the consequences of violent behavior can decrease this behavior. Children developed prosocial skills, gained in emotional development, and increased their abilities to cooperate and to resolve conflicts peacefully. (Three appendices include pre- and posttest results of the Personal/Social Skills Rating Scale. Contains 35 references.) (JW)

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Improving Prosocial Skills Through Developmentally Appropriate Strategies and Activities in a Prekindergarten Classroom

by

Dana Conway

Cluster 60

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A Practicum II Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Dana Conway under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

August 11, 1995
Date of Final Approval of Report

Roberta G. Schomburg
Dr. Roberta Schomburg, Adviser

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This writer would like to acknowledge Dr. R. Schomburg, whose extensive knowledge and deep understanding of early childhood development made this practicum a viable project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		iii
ABSTRACT		iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS		v
Chapter		
I	INTRODUCTION	1
	Description of Community	1
	Writer's Work Setting and Role	2
II	STUDY OF THE PROBLEM	5
	Problem Description	5
	Problem Documentation	7
	Causative Analysis	8
	Relationship of the Problem to the Literature	10
III	ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS	16
	Goals and Expectations	16
	Expected Outcomes	16
	Measurement of Outcomes	17
IV	SOLUTION STRATEGY	19
	Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions	19
	Description of Selected Solution	24
	Report of Action Taken	27
V	RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	30
	Results	30
	Discussion	36
	Recommendations	39
	Dissemination	40
REFERENCES		41

Page

APPENDICES

A PERSONAL/SOCIAL SKILLS RATING SCALE PRETEST RESULTS 45

B NEEDS ASSESSMENT 47

C PERSONAL/SOCIAL SKILLS RATING SCALE POSTTEST RESULTS 49

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE

1 Student Response to Most Important Skill Learned 33

2 Personal/Social Skills Rating Scale Pre/Posttest Comparison 34

ABSTRACT

Improving Prosocial Skills Through Developmentally Appropriate Strategies and Activities in a Prekindergarten Classroom. Conway, Dana, 1995: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Early Childhood. Prosocial Development/Conflict Resolution/Prekindergarten School Readiness/Trust/Autonomy/Aggression/Prosocial Curriculum/Body Awareness/Sensory Awareness/Kindness/ Cooperation/Emotional Development/Affiliation/Personal Development/Social Development

The purpose of this project was to initiate a prosocial curricula for Pre-K children. This curricula would serve as a precursor to conflict resolution. Through a series of activities and appropriate strategies, an improvement of social skills was made in a Pre-K classroom, children developed a sense of trust and autonomy, and learned alternatives to aggression.

This writer implemented a daily prosocial curriculum in a Pre-K classroom. Analysis of the data revealed that participants left the program with body awareness, cooperation, and kindness skills as well as negotiating and conflict resolution skills. The data also showed a reduction of referrals to family counseling services.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The community in which this practicum was implemented is located in an upper-middle class area in the southeastern United States. Although there are many family apartment buildings, most of the community surrounding the work setting is comprised of single-family homes. A public school is also located in this area with this writer's work setting being one of two private schools in the area.

The practicum site was located in a large urban city with a population of approximately 500,000 residents. The city has all the activities one would expect in a large city. Residents have access to public libraries, adult education classes at the public school, music, theater, museum, beach activities, and structured sport activities.

Several on-campus housing units provide housing on the grounds for faculty families. Due to the nature of the school entrance exams and the fact that this work setting is a private school, students come from all over the city and not one concentrated area.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

This practicum was implemented in a preprimary department of a college preparatory school. The school program was established to provide a school for winter residents and an individual curriculum was designed for each student. The school has grown over the years to accommodate full-time residents from Pre-K to grade 12. The goals of the school are to offer a developmentally enriched environment with high standards for academic excellence. Within this academic setting, values and religious views are presented, where Jewish and Christian views are explored.

Developing a positive self-esteem is a primary goal of the program. Socialization and relationships with peers are developed with the help of teacher-directed activities. Parent involvement is expected but not required.

The staff is made up of highly qualified teachers and aides. Some of the teachers have their master's degree and all aides have a degree of some kind, usually in education. The student-teacher ratio is one teacher and one aide to every 18 children. Special teachers are available for weekly/daily lessons in music, dance, developmental movement, and Spanish.

The campus is unique in its physical make-up. The school encompasses 47 acres, with three swimming pools, two gymnasiums, one 800-seat auditorium, and a man-made lake.

Each prekindergarten room is 60 x 30 feet with two sinks, two bathrooms, a large storage area for the teacher, and an intercom system. The plant has a large staff of maintenance workers who constantly keep the campus in peak condition. The playground facilities are appropriate for the students in the 4- to 5-year-old program. There are swings, slides, balance beams, climbing bars, a large playhouse, and plenty of open space for a child to run and explore. One full-time security guard patrols the school at all times. Maintenance crews also serve as additional security.

This program was designed for 4- to 5-year-old children. They were gifted students, mostly from affluent socioeconomic backgrounds, with parent and student expectations high. Although some students were bilingual, most were English speaking Caucasian. There are various hands-on, child-centered activities. Each day is assigned to a different center with six children at a center. The program is a mix between Montessori, Piaget, with an accent on whole language. Teachers can choose the degree of mixture they want in their classroom.

For the past 5 years the writer has been assigned to the preprimary department at this work setting. Past experience includes teaching on the elementary level, during which this writer noted students entering the elementary grades without the prosocial skills needed to be successful in the classroom while interacting with other peers. This

writer felt it was important to begin building these skills on the preprimary level. This writer has also been involved over the past 2 years with individualized remedial instruction on levels Pre-K through third grade. Although this is important, this writer noted much of the need for individualized instruction could be alleviated if children could resolve their conflict within their own classroom environment, clearing the way for successful learning. It was this experience, combined with advance degrees in early childhood and extensive curriculum planning, that enabled this writer to implement a prosocial practicum to its fullest impact.

During practicum implementation, this writer was assigned as a full-time classroom teacher in a prekindergarten class. This writer's class was made up of 18 prekindergarten students from upper multiethnic backgrounds. The ages ranged from 4 years 2 months to 5 years 5 months when beginning implementation. The classroom was self-contained which enabled this writer to be responsible for all areas of curriculum planning.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The problem experienced at this writer's school was a common issue throughout the nation. Children were coming to school with poor impulse control and a lack of prosocial skills. Teachers reported that children were having trouble joining a group successfully. Children did not have any preconflict resolution skills to beginning to peacefully settle disputes. They were not ready for social interaction and had not developed the basic skills needed for successful interaction, such as body and sensory awareness. These skills affect interpersonal relationships and help children express themselves. Teachers reported that these skills had not been developed, that children did not know "their space" and frequently infringed on others. Emotional development skills were lacking and children were not being exposed to emotional vocabulary required for successful group interaction. Children did not have the vocabulary necessary to express their feelings. They were not able to recognize emotions in themselves as well as in others, nor were they able to verbalize their feelings. Children often did not possess the first social task of affiliation which is the ability to approach others and initiate relationships.

This writer's work setting did not have specific guidelines when dealing with behavior of prosocial skills problems. There were often time delays between the action and punishment with use of time-out or bench time on the playground. Therefore, the students were unable to see the relation between the action and the punishment.

Many different behavior modification programs were being used. Teachers often chose any form of behavior modification technique they feel was sufficient. Formal instruction to the staff pertaining to behavior modification did not exist. Several special teachers were seen daily by the Pre-K students which created the problem of inconsistency in treatment for improper behavior. These special teachers (i.e., art, music, dance) did not plan with classroom teacher in regards to the best way to deal with a behavior problem.

Some teachers seemed to expect students to enter Pre-K with social skills developed and intact to a certain degree. Frequently, when this did not occur, the subjects were disciplined instead of being taught proper prosocial skills. Although some teachers tried to incorporate teaching prosocial skills into the daily curriculum, guidelines were not set into a written curriculum; therefore, these attempts failed.

Problem Documentation

Evidence of the problem was supported by the results of Smith's (1984) Personal/Social Skills Rating Scale. This rating scale was devised to keep records for individual children's progress over three periods of time. The scale is a simple informal instrument. A total of 43 skills can be assessed or a teacher can reduce the number to include only skills she would like to emphasize. Smith (1984) stresses that a child's performance is compared to a standard of behavior rather than the performance of others.

When assessing body awareness, this writer found that only five children achieved proficiency in all areas by achieving ++ in nine area skills (see Appendix A). Eight showed some evidence of knowledge but needed more opportunities to learn. Three more children were rated a zero, indicating no evidence of the skill at all, and two children were rated ?, due to insufficient observation. When evaluating emotional development through six skills on the rating scale, only four children achieved proficiency as noted by a ++ rating in four or more skills. Nine children achieved "some evidence" by rating + in four out of six skills. Three children rated no evidence of the skill or insufficient observation. When evaluating affiliation, the results are as follows: 11 achieved proficiency (++) in six out of eight skills, 5 showed some evidence of the skill by rating + in six out of the eight skills, and 3 showed no

evidence of the skill or insufficient observation by the teacher.

When evaluating conflict and cooperation skills (see Appendix A), the results were as follows. When observing 11 skills, 4 children achieved proficiency by a ++ rating in 9 of 11 skills, 11 children showed some evidence by rating + in 9 of 11 skills, and 3 children rated no evidence or insufficient observation.

The last skill rated was kindness. Four children demonstrated an awareness of acts of kindness by a ++ score in seven out of nine skills. Ten children demonstrated some evidence of the skills by achieving a + on seven out of nine skills and four children achieved no evidence or an insufficient observation rating in this skill area.

The teacher-made director survey also demonstrated more psychologist referrals than ever before for family counseling (see Appendix B). Many children were also involved in behavior modification programs. Teacher observations showed that these children had not acquired problem-solving skills and did not show many specific kindness skills.

Causative Analysis

Society is constantly changing. Violence is filtering into our lives and those of our children at an alarming rate. The American dream of raising children in a violence-free society is almost nonexistent. What is more alarming

is the amount of violence in which children are directly involved. Research has shown children do not possess negotiating, communicating, and cooperating skills to deal with this overpowering battle in their neighborhoods (Schomburg, 1993). The causes of the problem are from a combination of factors, procedures, people, materials, and attitudes. Children are beginning Pre-K without a sense of trust.

Children do not have a sense of autonomy and control. Children do not have the ability to manage aggression or aggressive feelings (Schomburg, 1993). Parents are having fewer children, thus decreasing time for sibling interaction. Both parents are working, which reduces the amount of parental interaction and guidance. Built-in support systems of extended family are almost nonexistent in today's transient society (Chambers, 1993).

Parents and teachers have realized that several options that have been used to discipline in the past have not achieved results required: (a) spanking - through this children learn that when you're big enough, hitting is acceptable; (b) threatening - children learn out of fear; and, in turn, will threaten others, often weaker children; (c) bribing - if this option is frequently used, a child will learn how to manipulate; and (d) using time-out - this option does not foster alternative solution thinking to a

problem, thus defeating the purpose of building communication and feeling awareness.

Teachers must be careful not to fall into a reward system pattern. External rewards should not be the focus of the activities but rather internal. Teachers report that the sticker system sometimes backfires and sends unclear messages to children. A child might rationalize, "First I must be bad, then good, then I can get a sticker" (Honig & Wittmer, 1992).

Teachers reported that the much needed social skills are absent when children begin their school career. Most research on this issue is centered around Piaget. Piaget believed that children are egocentric and cannot adequately begin to develop social skills until grades 1 or 2. Due to this, most studies and intervention have been on these levels or higher. In contrast, however, recent research (Abrahams, 1979; Hughes & Donaldson, 1983) challenge Piaget's stance on this issue. Many researchers are now finding children actually can begin building social skills at an earlier stage. Experts (Schomburg, 1993; Segal & Adcock, 1993) believe intervention can be successfully introduced at a Pre-K level.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A review of the literature suggests several causes to the problem. Violence is engulfing our society. Children are becoming desensitized by seeing violence not only on TV,

but in their own communities and neighborhoods. Schools are faced with the responsibility of trying to help children control aggressive feelings and help them from striking out violently (Smith, 1984).

For conflict resolution strategies to work in the upper grade levels, prosocial skills need to be fostered at the Pre-K level (Schomburg, 1993; Segal & Adcock, 1993). Pre-K teachers report children do not have the ability to control rage and impulse when dealing with conflict, and they often respond with violence. Preconflict resolution alternative techniques need to be taught to the Pre-K children to help alleviate this violence. Although Pre-K teachers know these need to be taught, there are not many activities written for younger children. Most conflict resolution activities are geared toward older children. Early childhood teachers must find a curriculum that fits their classroom and create an environment conducive for conflict resolution (Honig & Wittmer, 1992).

Parents sometimes push children too quickly into sharing. This can be detrimental when children have not been able to develop a sense of trust and understand that they will not lose their toy permanently. In turn, when children continually feel powerless they will try to exert power over weaker children (Schomburg, 1993). These children will also try to find ways to gain power in play situations. Children also learn to manipulate peers and

adults. This can be accomplished by temper tantrums, hitting, or verbal aggression. Violence plays a big role in our children's lives. Violence has a detrimental effect on our children whether it is direct within their environment or indirect (i.e., TV). Since children have a hard time telling the difference between what is real and what is fiction, many problems can arise from this in a classroom. Scolding and time-out sometimes make children more aggressive toward teachers and other children. Time-out does not make children aware of consequences or take responsibility for their actions if it is not done immediately. This approach, although sometimes successful, does not teach the child how to properly react or interact.

This writer made the following observations within a Pre-K classroom. When children needed to make choices, conflicts arose. Children had trouble carrying out a significant task without infringing on other's space and had to constantly seek approval of certain children, as well as adults. Children had trouble recognizing other expressive movement and when they did successfully recognize it, they did not know how to respond to it. Children do not have body and sensory awareness (Smith, 1984). They often trespass on other children's territory. Students do not recognize emotions in others and do not have the skills to respond with positive emotional vocabulary.

Students have not acquired the first social task of affiliation, which is the ability to approach others and initiate relationships (Schomburg, 1993). Problems of children fighting for personal power is being shown when students refuse to obey teachers, fight with their peers, and refuse to cooperatively resolve conflict. Problems also arise when parents are not aware of long dormant feelings which inhibit them to relinquish power and demonstrate autonomy without their feelings being threatened. Today, many children display aggressive play. This aggressive play can show a sense of vulnerability, fear of violent repercussions, and questioning of hostile feelings toward family and friends (Schomburg, 1993).

Slade (1994) reported that Pre-K children cannot settle disputes in the classroom without teacher intervention. When conflict arises, many children demonstrate frustration and anger when not getting their way, then the anger turns to aggression. Another problem is schools sometimes create an environment that is highly competitive (Slade, 1994).

Outside environment has also affected children's prosocial skills. Society is often caught up by needs or choice to make money, therefore, parent-child interaction is diminished. Specific cultures have not exposed children to morals and values the way they used to. Children's frequent companions are TV and the streets instead of family and friends (Parry, 1993). Children are exposed to violence and

have trouble distinguishing between reality and fantasy; this aggressive viewing has an effect on aggressive play and prosocial behavior (Sutton-Smith, 1992).

Schomburg (1993) verifies Edwards' (1992) view that children are lacking in trust, protection, and mutual regard that should allow them to grow in cooperation, problem solving, and positive social behavior. Carlson-Paige and Levin (1992) report that viewing such programs as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles influences children's behavior toward aggressive play. Children do not know how to rechannel negative stress-related behaviors, such as hitting, pushing, and loud talking to positive prosocial skills (Piper, 1988).

Eisenberg et al. (1992) stated that individual differences account for various emotional responses and affect a child's tendency to or not to engage in prosocial behavior. Keeping this in mind, all children should be exposed to positive behavior. Chambers' (1993) study of initiating cooperative activities within a kindergarten classroom confirms Segal and Adcock's (1993) position that children need to be exposed to positive play situations with teachers modeling positive prosocial skills. Jensen's (1993) research in another study supports Segal and Adcock (1993) and Smith (1984) by stating that programs designed with specific activities to enhance prosocial behavior can be successful.

In a 5-month study by Rizzo (1992), children's disputes were identified in regards to their relationships, in which children need to have positive role models to pattern behavior; many do not. Rizzo (1992) stated that cultural understanding should be made a prerequisite for classroom teacher to be successful in developing prosocial skills.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals and outcomes were projected for this practicum. Children will display prosocial skills that will enable them to be successful in a cooperative classroom and children will demonstrate a sense of trust, autonomy, and be able to handle aggressive feelings.

Expected Outcomes

After implementing a prosocial curriculum through strategies and activities, the expected outcomes were as follows:

1. Ten out of 18 children will demonstrate a sense of trust as indicated on the Personal/Social Skills Rating Scale by scoring 80% competency in the skill.

2. Ten out of 18 children will demonstrate a sense of autonomy as indicated on the Personal/Social Skills Rating Scale by scoring 80% competency in the skill.

3. Ten children will be able to channel aggressive feelings as measured by a teacher-made teacher observation checklist with a reduction by 50% of physical aggression.

Measurement of Outcomes

When evaluating trust and a sense of autonomy, the evaluating tool, Smith's (1984) Personal/Social Skills Rating Scale, was used to measure competency. The following areas were evaluated: body awareness, emotional development, affiliation, conflict and cooperation, and kindness.

The combined scores of body awareness, emotional development, and affiliation on the rating scale were used to determine if trust has been attained; and outcome 1 had been achieved. It was expected that 10 out of 18 children would achieve a combined score of 80% competency in these areas.

The combined scores of kindness and cooperation and conflict on the rating scale were used to determine if autonomy had been attained and outcome 2 had been achieved. It was expected that 10 of 18 children would achieve a combined score of 80% competency in these areas.

A teacher-made teacher observation checklist was used to determine if outcome 3 had been achieved and the children channeled aggressive feelings. It was expected that children would reduce physical contact by 50% as shown on the teacher observation checklist.

Additional benefits of this practicum were shown by a decrease of referrals to family counseling shown on the

teacher-made director survey and a decrease of students on behavior modification as reported by teachers.

After reviewing this qualitative research, this writer is anxious to continue implementing during the next school year to analyze whether the group was an exception or the curriculum is truly working.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

Children were entering prekindergarten and were not equipped with the necessary prosocial skills that would enable them to interact with the group successfully. The literature suggest many solutions to the problem. Older children within a mixed-age classroom exhibit facilitative leadership which promotes prosocial behavior in younger children by modeling appropriate behavior skills (Katz, 1989). Many mixed-age classrooms display more prosocial behavior than the class composed of the same-age students (Winsler, 1993).

Studies suggest that teachers can take to the challenge against the use of violence by children when trying to resolve issues. Actions show early intervention and teaching specific skills to help children resolve conflicts are successful (Carlson-Paige & Levin, 1992). In this writer's opinion, results by Oken-Wright (1992) reiterate Carlson-Paige and Levin's (1992) study by stating the teacher behavior continuum, which is a model of strategies for teachers to use in interacting with children, is successful when intervention is early.

A 1991 study suggests the relationship of family interaction and experience can positively influence prosocial behavior (Kemple, 1991). Young children are capable of prosocial behavior interactions while participating in games when games possess cooperative goal structures rather than competitive goal structures (Grineski, 1989). An recent investigation in the relationship between the self-concept of 4- and 5-year-olds indicates a significant correlation between self-concept and cooperative behavior (Cauley & Tyler, 1989). When a child initiates cooperative behavior, it is more effective than teacher-directed instruction with the child only performing to please the teacher (Cauley & Tyler, 1989). Only performing to please the teacher, the child will revert to negative social behavior when the teacher is no longer present. Positive reinforcement and role playing are effective in fostering prosocial behavior (Marantz, 1988). A 1988 study by Honig and Pollack (1988) verified that the reward system implemented in a kindergarten classroom promoted prosocial behavior. Children began reporting during circle time how they had been kind, cooperative, helpful, or had shared with a peer (Honig & Pollack, 1988).

Preschool curriculum should be enriched with antibias prosocial curriculum. Adult caregivers should implement a curriculum that encourages interpersonal consideration and cooperation when children interact together in group

settings. According to Honig and Wittmer (1992), specific skills and goals that preprimary teachers should include are:

- showing sympathy and kindness,
- helping,
- giving,
- accepting food or toys,
- sharing
- showing positive verbal and physical contact,
- comforting another person in distress,
- donating to others,
- showing concern,
- responding to bereaved peers,
- taking the perceptive of another person,
- showing affection, and
- cooperating with others in play or to complete a task (p. 4)

Honig (1982) stated that if teachers take time to demonstrate successful prosocial behaviors, as well as encourage, facilitate, and teach these skills; prosocial interactions will increase and aggression will decrease. Bryan (1977) also stated children imitate the behavior they are most frequently in contact with, therefore, "modeling" rather than "preaching" has been more successful. Teachers need to encourage prosocial behavior through positive comments. The curriculum needs to contain several opportunities for children to dialogue and role play (Vorrath, 1985). Grusec and Redler (1980) emphasize teachers' comments should be specific regarding the positive behavior. For example, "You were kind when you helped Johnny take off his jacket."

Teachers can help children think through conflict situations. Alternative solutions should be applied through a step-by-step method, such as conflict resolution techniques which are used with older children to create a win-win situation. Teachers, on the other hand, who use a punitive system to develop prosocial skills will instead foster manipulative, noncooperative skills in a child (Eisenberg, Lennon, & Roth, 1983).

Many children have been exposed to negative effects of society, especially violence in the media. Television has enhanced negative behavior by demonstrating when conflict arises, anger follows, and the response is violence. Teachers need to prompt children to take another avenue to rechannel feelings when conflict arises. The feeling of frustration, not anger, should follow conflict; then the appropriate response should be innovation and creativity to find a solution (Dinwiddie, 1994).

Adult stress management techniques of exercise and relaxation were used for 3- to 5-year-old children. Specifically, children were taught visualization techniques and deep breathing (Piper, 1988). The goal was to rechannel children's negative stress-related behaviors, such as hitting, pushing, and loud talking into creative and productive outlets (Piper). Results showed the group as a whole increased self-control and the mood was calmer and more cooperative (Piper).

Several techniques can be used to create a more relaxed classroom environment. Backrubs help children relax. Sand and water play help establish a tranquil feeling in certain children. Wiggling in groups to music or separately on mats can be a good outlet for children. Classical music and imagery activities can reduce tension. A teacher needs to find which activities work best with certain children (Honig & Wittmer, 1992).

Slade (1994) stated that to build a better kindergarten, teachers must deliver prosocial skills as part of the daily curriculum. Conflict resolution and peer mediation has been introduced to school. Teachers hope this will have a positive impact on children now and when they merge into society. Three tasks have to be accomplished for conflict resolution strategies to work. Children must have the ability to trust others (Schomburg, 1993; Erikson, 1953). Children must have a feeling of control of themselves and empowerment (Schomburg, 1993; Segal & Adcock, 1993). Children must learn to view another person's point of view in a conflict situation and be able to find an alternative to aggressive behavior (Segal & Adcock, 1993).

Erikson (1953) stated children must develop a sense of trust which enables them to feel safe in their own environment. Adult caregivers must instill trust by responding promptly to a child's needs (Erikson, 1953).

Consistent, warm loving care and providing a safe caring environment helps promote trust (Katz, 1989). "Adult interaction should be consistent, supportive, and responsive" (Schomburg, 1993). Children need to be exposed to a positive prosocial environment. Children need to be exposed to cooperative play which will facilitate and teach alternative ways to aggressive play. Alternatives to hitting and pushing and loud talking should be modeled in a classroom. Anger should be redirected to a new behavior instead of aggression. Daily dialogue should significantly reduce altercations. Children need to practice "peace" vocabulary. Daily intervention should be introduced at circle time where positive reinforcement can be used. Trust, autonomy and control, and the ability to manage aggression need to be developed for a successful school career (Schomburg, 1993).

Description of Selected Solution

Children need to be encouraged to understand and verbalize their own feelings, as well as those of other children. Awareness needs to begin with being able to identify and label feelings (Barnett, 1984). Children are becoming more aware of feelings of fear, anger, sadness, and happiness between the ages of 3 to 8 (Borke, 1971). Teachers need to acknowledge these feelings and empower the child to verbalize them. Role playing and dramatic play are major techniques when building a prosocial curriculum. One

method of building a curriculum is to define skills to be taught in behavioral terms and determine the children's competency level, then teach the skills that need to be developed (Cartledge & Milburn, 1980). Skills should include: listening, brave talk, polite talk, sharing, taking turns, and playing with a partner (Factor & Schilmoeller, 1983). A positive prosocial classroom ambience should be created and modeled for children to succeed. The goals of the curriculum should be to develop independence and a strong self-esteem. Teachers can offer a combination of different solutions for children to learn: redirect a child if there is not time to go into depth with other strategies; restructure the classroom environment to help children negotiate a solution; offer choices - do not back a child into a corner with no way out; empower him to find alternative solutions; and help him to evaluate consequences and verbalize feelings (Dinwiddie, 1994). According to Dinwiddie, children will learn best by "hands-on experiences occurring during play" (p. 19). Children need to learn specific behaviors that will enable them to negotiate positively through group interactions (Dinwiddie).

For these reasons, this writer chose to implement a prosocial curriculum on a daily basis. The skills were introduced with a theme and corresponding activity for the day of the week. Following Segal and Adcock's (1993) and Smith's (1984) recommendations, this writer used strategies

and activities to help make students aware of feelings within themselves as well as others. This writer helped students build necessary vocabulary to become successful negotiators when dealing with conflict. This writer felt the activities within Segal and Adcock's and Smith's books are very child-centered and developmentally appropriate. The activities were easily initiated in a large or small group setting. These activities reduced violence by supplying children with alternatives to violence or aggressive behaviors.

This writer facilitated development in the aforementioned area through a variety of steps. This writer provided an environment for which children could learn to interact with others successfully (Schomburg, 1993). Through varied daily activities this writer helped foster trust, a sense of autonomy, and control and supplied alternative ways for children to handle aggression (Smith, 1984).

Implementation included 18 Pre-K 4- and 5-year-old students. The classroom was large and child-centered. A whole group circle time daily activity was the basis for the prosocial curriculum. Solutions included discussions, role playing, puppets, modeling, stories, and cooperative learning lesson activities.

Report of Action Taken

Activities were as follows:

All of month 1 was used to assess the 18 Pre-K students participating in this practicum. Pretest of the Personal/Social Skills Rating Scale was given and results tallied.

Two goals for the second month were to help children understand the growth processes and express creative movement. Key concepts included growing up and life. The teacher helped children understand physical differences and abilities between children and helped children identify and name body parts. Another goal was to help children develop body awareness, especially in relation to spacial movement. Key concepts were body and space.

Children were helped to understand physical similarities and differences among children. They explored feelings associated with satisfaction and acceptance of one's physical self. Children were encouraged to praise themselves.

An additional goal was to help children be aware of movement. Key concepts were dancing, movement, and relaxing.

The goal in month 3 was to promote sensitivity to touch and taste. Concepts were smooth, sweet, and awareness. Other concepts were gentleness, rough, touch, and relating tactile experiences to vocabulary.

The goal in month 4 was to promote children's awareness of sounds. Concepts were silence, soft, loud, high, low, awareness, talking, and hearing. Children were helped to develop self-control, to promote emotional awareness, and to become aware of basic feelings. The concepts were happy, sad, angry, afraid, disgust (yucky feeling), calm, affectionate, and excited. A midpoint assessment was conducted at this time.

During month 5, the goals were to promote a sense of trust and help to control aggressive behavior. This included feelings of awareness and sensitivity to other's feelings. Concepts were sad, happy, afraid, angry, and others. Children were helped to deal with feelings associated with threats to safety and to understand the relationship between emotions and social behavior.

The goals in month 6 were to help establish a sense of autonomy and to promote affiliation. Children achieved social contact by becoming more aware of each other's names and by forming partnerships. They explored social concepts through group activities. The key concepts were individuals joining a group and friends. Activities helped children build relationships.

The activities in month 7 helped to promote conflict resolution, cooperation, and to foster trust.

The goal in month 8 was to help promote kindness skills. Children were helped to offer and accept gentle

affection and affirmation. They were also helped to become aware of personal strengths in themselves and others. A posttest was given to all 18 children.

All activities were done in circle time when possible. Circle time was 8:30 - 9:00 a.m. daily. If carryover time was needed, a daily midday group time (10:00-10:15 a.m.) was used to initiate feedback and discussion. Activities were taken from Promoting the Social Development of Young Children: Strategies and Activities (Smith, 1984) and Play Together, Grow Together (Segal & Adcock, 1993).

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

Society is struggling to preserve itself and its children. Schools must do their part and take responsibility to help control violence that is swallowing our streets. "Conflict resolution" are the words that spring to mind when discussing education and violence in our society. It is a step in the right direction, but we must begin with a crawl. On the Pre-K level, children must learn prosocial behavior for conflict resolution to work later. Today, teachers are quick to point out or react to a child who is not conforming or being prosocial. Teachers have realized that children do not necessarily acquire prosocial skills naturally.

After exploring this issue at this writer's workplace, the writer found several children on the Pre-K level having trouble adapting to a group situation. The director of the pre-primary department has noted that there have been more referrals to psychologists to help with behavioral problems than ever before.

Research shows children are not equipped with the skills to be successful in a cooperative learning environment. Schomburg (1993) states this is due to three

tasks that have not been mastered prior to entering school. They are as follows: Children have not developed a sense of trust; children have not developed a sense of autonomy; and children have not been taught how to channel aggressive feelings appropriately. This is due to children being rushed into situations they are not comfortable with yet, such as sharing a toy when the child is not sure it will be returned. A child must feel safe, loved, and well provided for to develop a sense of trust. Children must be empowered to establish a sense of autonomy. Parents must provide opportunities for a child to "win" in a situation and establish presence of self.

Children's exposure to violence must be limited. Research shows viewing violence on television as well as real life can be extremely detrimental. Children have a hard time distinguishing between fantasy and what is real (Sutton-Smith, 1992). Children need positive role models when it comes to handling aggression (Katz, 1989). Alternatives to aggression can be facilitated through various avenues. Art, role playing, storytelling, clay, puppets, and discussion are just a few ways to foster prosocial behavior (Segal & Adcock, 1993). Slade (1994) reports in the New York Times that the early childhood curriculum needs to include socialization skills that will enable children to grow up to become productive citizens.

Katz (1984) states we as educators must facilitate development in this area through a variety of steps. Smith (1984) also believes that there are a series of activities that can foster development of trust, autonomy and control, and the ability to manage aggression in young children. Providing the proper environment for children to learn to interact with others successfully, can help build toward a productive school career and help take a step to protect our society against the battle of violence we now seem to be losing.

The solution strategy was made up of several components. First, following the recommendation of Segal and Adcock (1993) of providing opportunities for alternatives to aggression through art, role playing, storytelling, and clay puppets, this writer included these activities within the prosocial curriculum at circle time. Second, this writer implemented a Pre-K prosocial curriculum (Schomburg, 1993; Smith, 1984) that fostered development of trust, autonomy, and control. This writer also consulted the director of the pre-primary department to evaluate whether there was a reduction of referrals for aggressive behavior.

This writer implemented monthly inventive spelling journals for each child from the beginning of the year. The children initiated writing on the first day of school and responded to questions asked by the teacher. Special events

and holidays were included in this journal. An exciting unexpected outcome evolved after completing the scheduled implementation of the practicum. During the last week of school, this writer asked the students "what was the most important thing they learned this school year." The students wrote their responses in their journals. A strong correlation was noted between the practicum initiated prosocial curriculum and the children's journal writing. Responses ranged from cognitive skills acquired to an overwhelming majority noting prosocial skills as being the most important skill acquired for the year. Responses are included in Table 1.

Table 1

Student Response to Most Important Skill Learned

Responses	Number of Students
Prosocial Skills	
sharing	2
love the class	3
talking problems out	4
working things out	2
making new friends	3
learning manners	1
Academic Cognitive Development	
learning numbers	1
learning letters	1
reading book	1

In addition to the responses, pictures were drawn to accompany the children's statements. Interestingly, 4 out of 18 students included a circle in their drawing. This

writer implemented the majority of the prosocial curriculum within a circle. For this reason, this writer suggests as many as possible activities to be provided in a relaxed circle time with teacher and students on the floor.

The first outcome, that 10 out of 18 children will develop a sense of trust as indicated on the Personal/Social Skills Rating Scale by scoring 80% competency in the skill, was met. For the first outcome, 15 children scored 80% or greater competency.

The second outcome, 10 out of 18 children will develop a sense of autonomy as indicated on the Personal/Social Skill Rating Scale by scoring 80% competency in the skill, was also met. For the second objective, 14 children scored 80% or greater competency.

These outcomes not only were met, as expected, but surpassed the projected outcomes (see Appendix C). The Personal/Social Skills Rating Scale pre/posttest comparison showed the following results (see Table 2).

Table 2

Personal/Social Skills Rating Scale Pre/Posttest Comparison

Skill Area	Pretest/Posttest Scores[a] ++	+	0?	?
Body Awareness	5/15	8/1	3/2	2/0
Emotional Development	4/10	9/7	2/1	1/0
Affiliation	11/14	5/3	2/1	1/0
Conflict and Cooperation	4/15	11/2	1/1	2/0
Kindness	4/16	10/1	2/1	2/0

[a]Number of students out of 20 with scores of ++, +, 0?, ?

When assessing body awareness, this writer found 15 children achieved proficiency in all areas by achieving ++ in nine area skills. One child rated + which indicated some evidence of knowledge but not proficiency; and two children rated zero, equating no evidence of the skill at all.

When evaluating emotional development through six skills on the rating scale, 10 children achieved proficiency as noted by a ++ rating in four or more skills. Seven children achieved some evidence by rating + in four out of six skills. One child rated little evidence of the skill. This writer prefers to refer to this as a delay in the emotional development rather than state that no evidence of the skill is evident.

When evaluating affiliation, the results are as follows: 14 achieved proficiency (++) in six out of eight skills, three showed some evidence of the skill by rating + in six out of the eight skills, and one showed little evidence of the skill (0).

When evaluating conflict and cooperation skills, the results were as follows. When observing 11 skills, 15 children achieved proficiency by a ++ rating in 9 of 11 skills, two children showed some evidence by rating + in 9 of 11 skills, and one child still showed little evidence of these skills.

The last skill evaluated was kindness. This showed the greatest increase of all, and in this writer's opinion, most

important. Sixteen children demonstrated an awareness of acts of kindness by a ++ score in seven out of nine skills. One child demonstrated some evidence of the skill by achieving a + on seven out of nine skills, and one child showed little consistent evidence of this skill.

The third outcome, that children will be able to channel aggressive feelings as measured by a teacher-made observation checklist with a reduction by 50% of physical aggression, was met. The outcome showed a reduction of more than 70% of physical aggression. The teacher-made director survey demonstrated zero referrals were made from this writer's class for behavior problems. The students within this writer's class were very cooperative and eager to cooperate. Special teachers and playground aides reported consistently that this class was so wonderful to work with. The comments focused on their positive behavior and politeness. These children did not receive time-out on the playground and were constantly praised for their positive behavior.

Discussion

This writer received several comments from parents about how polite and cooperative this group of children were even out of the classroom at events, such as birthday parties, when the teacher was not present. Interestingly enough, parents were impressed by their willingness to take turns and share and look out for the general welfare of the

group. Comments from the parents included the following: "These children are so polite to each other," "What a great group of children. They all played well together," "I can't wait for my son to be in your class to learn all of these skills," and "My daughter actually told my husband and I to talk out our problem like her teacher does at school." At the end of the year, one parent commented that she is constantly amazed by the comments her daughter makes about being cooperative and working things out with her siblings. The same parent echoed this writer's feelings when she stated, "she can't wait until her son is in this writer's class and sees if this group is an exception or if in fact success was due to the prosocial curriculum initiated by this writer."

There were two children whose behavior was perplexing to this writer. Student A seemed to regress as the prosocial curriculum was taught. This student had little sense of body awareness and what she did have seemed to deteriorate as the year went on. Student A would walk into people and sit where most children could identify there was not enough space to fit. Her physical appearance was so unkept other teachers, parents, and students noticed. This student had no awareness when her hair was hanging in her face. This writer had to tell her to move her hair out of her face and try to tell her how to keep herself neat. Student B, who did not meet the competency, was what this

writer would call a textbook case. This student came to this writer's class after being just diagnosed as attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD). Student B did not possess a sense of trust or autonomy and had aggressive behavior. This child had been in a day care environment which was extremely hostile. The parent reported he had to even fight to keep his lunch. Slowly over several weeks, student B started to trust this writer's classroom environment. This writer's first objective was to create a classroom environment that was safe for all. This child did finally respond to the prosocial curriculum although it was not consistent.

This writer was excited when an unexpected outcome came to light. As explained earlier in this practicum report, this writer asked the children to express in writing and a drawing "what was the most important thing that they learned this year." Sixteen children wrote inventive writing sentences stating a prosocial skill as the most important skill learned this year. The results were broken down into specific skills as follows:

- showing sympathy and kindness,
- helping,
- giving,
- accepting food or toys,
- sharing
- showing positive verbal and physical contact,
- comforting another person in distress,
- donating to others,
- showing concern,
- responding to bereaved peers,
- taking the perceptive of another person,

- showing affection, and
- cooperating with others in play or to complete a task (Honig & Wittmer, 1992, p. 4)

Interestingly enough, the drawings were quite revealing. Several students chose to illustrate a circle indicating circle time along with their sentence. This writer felt this prosocial curriculum, combined with the group personality, influenced these children to become better negotiators, able to read and decode others' feelings in the group. This writer will implement this prosocial curriculum with the next assigned class. It is this writer's opinion that this age (4-5 years) can be receptive to preconflict resolution skills and it should be implemented in all preschools on a daily basis to some degree. These practicum results should begin to fill the void of research of positive prosocial skill intervention on a Pre-K level.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations this author would make as a result of this practicum. First, this writer felt implementation at the same time of day is a must. A relaxed atmosphere, such as circle time on the floor, would be preferred. Parent volunteers who work in the classroom should have a formal training meeting and reminder follow-up letters. In addition to notifying parent in-class volunteers, information about skills taught were sent home in a weekly newsletter. This writer felt this constant

prosocial "blurb" helped parents keep abreast of the "avenue" the teacher was traveling with their children. This writer would also recommend a follow-up form to follow the children to the next teacher. In the case of student A, who did not have much body awareness, the teacher would be aware of interventions that had a positive effect on this child.

Dissemination

As a result of this practicum, this writer will infuse this practicum prosocial curriculum to other Pre-K teachers. Other Nova early childhood cluster members have asked for copies to implement in their early childhood programs. This writer will devise a checklist to be collected at the end of the year where this prosocial curriculum was implemented, therefore, enabling this writer to keep collecting data in this field.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PERSONAL/SOCIAL SKILLS RATING SCALE PRETEST RESULTS

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PERSONAL/SOCIAL SKILLS RATING SCALE PRETEST RESULTS

Skill Area	[a]Pretest Scores ++	+	0?	?
Body Awareness	5	8	3	2
Emotional Development	4	9	2	1
Affiliation	11	5	2	1
Conflict and Cooperation	4	11	1	2
Kindness	4	10	2	2

[a]Number of students out of 20 scoring ++, +, 0?, ?

APPENDIX B

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

APPENDIX B

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

TO: Preprimary Director

FROM: Dana Conway

RE: Needs Assessment

Using the scale of 1 through 5, with the least referral amount year as 1, please rank the following years according to the frequency of referrals in the Pre-K classrooms.

1989	1
1990	2
1991	4
1992	3
1993	5

Do you see an increase of aggressive behavior in Pre-K students? Yes _X_ No ___

APPENDIX C

PERSONAL/SOCIAL SKILLS RATING SCALE POSTTEST RESULTS

APPENDIX C

PERSONAL/SOCIAL SKILLS RATING SCALE POSTTEST RESULTS

Skill Area	[a]Posttest Scores ++	+	0?	?
Body Awareness	15	1	2	0
Emotional Development	10	7	1	0
Affiliation	14	3	1	0
Conflict and Cooperation	15	2	1	0
Kindness	16	1	1	0

[a]Number of students out of 20 scoring ++, +, 0?, ?